Transcript of Adam Lanza's Call to *AnarchyRadio*

On 20 December 2011, Adam Lanza called in to a talk radio program, *AnarchyRadio,* broadcasted on KWVA 88.1 FM out of the University of Oregon. The show is hosted by John Zerzan, a writer described by *The Atlantic* as "an intellectual leader of the anarcho-primitivist movement, an ideology that regards technology as a destroyer of human communities." The reason for Lanza's interest in Zerzan's writings is plainly evident in the call itself; Lanza calls to share a story about "Travis the Chimp," a domesticated chimpanzee that in 2009 "snapped," and viciously attacked 55-year-old Charla Nash, a friend of the chimp's owner. The attack was seemingly random, nearly cost the victim her life, and ended when the chimp was shot by police. Lanza outlines how the chimp's violent episode can be explained by his upbringing "as if he were a [human] child," and argues that Travis's "civilized" upbringing was what led to his attack.

JOHN ZERZAN: Here we go . . . hello. We got the collapsible headphones here but, uh, we're back.

CO-HOST: [*Unintelligible*] . . . we've got Greg on the phone.

ZERZAN: Oh, Greg, okay, how's it going?

ADAM LANZA: Hi, good. Um. I'm a fan of your writing. Um.

ZERZAN: Thank you.

LANZA: I'm sorry to [bring up?] such an old news story but I couldn't find anything that you said about the topic, and it seems relevant to your interests, so I thought I would bring up Travis the Chimp, do you remember him?

ZERZAN: I don't!

LANZA: Well, he was the highly domesticated chimpanzee who lived in a suburban home in Stamford, Connecticut.

CO-HOST: Oh, yeah.

ZERZAN: Oh.

LANZA: And he was raised just like a human child, starting from the week he was born. By the time that he was fourteen years old, which would be somewhere around age twenty in human years –

ZERZAN: Uh-huh.

LANZA: – um, he slept in a bed, he took his own baths, he dressed himself, he brushed his teeth with an electric toothbrush.

ZERZAN: [*laughs*] Really? When was this?

LANZA: Um. Well, this happened in early 2009.

ZERZAN: Oh.

Transcribed by Ilana Masad.
Originally published by Reed Coleman on the *Sandy Hook Lighthouse* blog. To hear a recording of the segment, and for an explanation of how we know that the caller is Adam Lanza, see sandyhooklighthouse.wordpress.com.

CO-HOST: Oh.

LANZA: Um.

ZERZAN: Uh-huh?

LANZA: He ate his meals at a table and enjoyed human foods like ice cream and he used a remote control to watch television and liked baseball games. And he even used a computer to look at pictures on the internet.

ZERZAN: Huh!

LANZA: And, [*chuckles*] it goes without saying that Travis was very overweight. He was two hundred pounds when he should have been around the low hundreds.

ZERZAN: Mmhm.

LANZA: And he was actually taking Xanax.

CO-HOST: [*laughs*]

ZERZAN: Amazing.

LANZA: I couldn't find any information about why he was taking it, but it just seems to say a lot that he was given it at all. And, basically, I think Travis wasn't really any different than a mentally handicapped human child.

ZERZAN: Hmm.

LANZA: But anyway, one day in February 2009, he was acting very agitated, and at some point grabbed the car – his owner's car keys, went outside and started beeping from car to car, apparently wanting to go for a car ride, and he was acting very aggressively, so his owner called her friend over to get her to help him to calm down and go back inside, and once she arrived he immediately attacked her and his owner tried to stop him but couldn't and she even resorted to stabbing him with a knife, but nothing worked. And she said that after she stabbed him he looked at her as if to say, "Why'd you do that to me, Mom?" Because apparently that was what the relationship was like, no different than between a human mother and a human child.

ZERZAN: Hmm.

LANZA: So after the stabbing, she called the police, who arrived twelve minutes after the attack, at which point her friend was pretty close to dead. And once the cruiser came up, Travis went over to it, tried to open the locked passenger door. He smashed off the side-view mirror, went over to the driver's door, opened it, and the cop shot him. He fled back into the house, where he went to his playroom and bled to death.

ZERZAN: Hmm …

LANZA: And um, [*chuckles*] this might not seem very relevant, but I'm bringing it up because afterward, everyone was condemning his owner for saying how irresponsible she was for raising a chimp like it was a child. And that she should have known something like this would happen, because chimps aren't supposed to be living in civilization, they're supposed to be living in the wild, among each other.

ZERZAN: Mhmm.

LANZA: But, their criticism stops there and the implication is that there's no way anything could have gone wrong in his life if he had been living in this civilization as a human rather than a chimp.

ZERZAN: Ah, indeed.

LANZA: [And?] I'm so interested in Travis, um, because he brings up questions about this whole process of child-raising. Um.

ZERZAN: Yeah.

LANZA: Civilization isn't something which just happens to gently exist without us having to do anything, because every newborn child – human child – is born in a chimp-like state, and civilization is only sustained by conditioning them for years on end so that they'll accept it for what it is. And since we've gone through this conditioning, we can observe a human family raising a human child, and I'm sure that even you have trouble intuitively seeing it as something unnatural, but when we see a chimp in that position, we [visually?] know that there's something profoundly wrong with the situation. And it's easy to say there's something wrong with it simply because it's a chimp, but what's the real difference between us and our closest relatives? Travis wasn't an untamed monster at all. Um, he wasn't just feigning domestication, he *was* civilized. Um, he was able to integrate into society, he was a chimp actor when he was younger, and his owner drove him around the city frequently in association with her towing business, where he met many different people, and got along with everyone. If Travis had been some nasty monster all his life, it would have been widely reported, but to the contrary, it seems like everyone who knew him said how shocked they were that Travis had been so savage, because they knew him as a sweet child. And – there were two isolated incidents early in his life when he acted aggressively, but summarizing them would take too long, so basically I'll just say that he didn't act really any differently than a human child would, and the people who would use that as an indictment against having chimps live as humans do wouldn't apply the same thing to humans, so it's just kind of irrelevant.

ZERZAN: Mhmm.

LANZA: But anyway, look what civilization did to him: it had the same exact effect on him as it has on humans. He was profoundly sick, in every sense of the term, and he had to resort to these surrogate activities like watching baseball, and looking at pictures on a computer screen, and taking Xanax. He was a complete mess.

ZERZAN: Mhm.

LANZA: And his attack wasn't simply because he was a senselessly violent, impulsive chimp. Um, which was how his behavior was universally portrayed. Um, immediately before his attack, he had desperately been wanting his owner to drive him somewhere, and the best reason I can think of for why he would want that, looking at his entire life, would be that some little thing he experienced was the last straw, and he was overwhelmed by the life that he had, and he wanted to get out of it by changing his environment, and the best way that he knew how to deal with that was by getting his owner to drive him somewhere else.

ZERZAN: Yeah.

LANZA: And when his owner's – owner's friend arrived, he knew that she was trying to coax him back into his life of domestication, and he couldn't handle that, so – he attacked her, and anyone else who approached them. And dismissing his attack as simply being the senseless violence and impulsiveness of a chimp, instead of a human, is wishful thinking at best.

ZERZAN: Mmm-hmm.

LANZA: His attack can be seen entirely parallel to the attacks and random acts of violence that you bring up on your show every week –

ZERZAN: Mmm …

LANZA: – committed by humans, which the mainstream also has no explanation for, and –

ZERZAN: No.

LANZA: – and actual humans – I just don't think it would be such a stretch to say that he very well could have been a teenage mall shooter or something like that.

ZERZAN: Yeah, yeah.

LANZA: And –

ZERZAN: Wow. Thank you, Greg.

LANZA: Yeah, I –

ZERZAN: That's quite a story. Yeah, that's, uh, really apropos, isn't it.

LANZA: Yeah.

ZERZAN: Travis the Chimp.

LANZA: It's just that I'm a little surprised that I never heard you bring it up at all because [*chuckles*] maybe I'm just seeing connections where there aren't any, but –

ZERZAN: Not – I think not, no, I just, I didn't catch that one, I didn't, uh – maybe I was out of the country or something, I don't know but I missed it. Thanks very much, man.

LANZA: Thank you. Bye.

ZERZAN: Take care. Wow. Very well articulated, I think. Okay, well, uh, uh, I guess we better move on …